
Is Law School the Right Choice for You?

YOU know what you want to be—a lawyer! But do you know what you want to do? The life of a lawyer may not be what you think it is. Movies and TV are not always accurate portrayals of the work of a lawyer. Before spending time and money for a law degree, find out how lawyers spend their time and what they do on a day-to-day basis.

An excellent way to see what lawyers do is to shadow one for a day or so. You may be able to serve as a “runner” in a law office. Runners usually file papers for the attorney at the county courthouse. Just being around a law office or in settings where lawyers work can help you see what they do and whether this is something you want to pursue as a career. An even better way to learn about this profession is to volunteer or intern in a law office for a longer time.

Visit the Boone County Circuit Court at Cherry and Eighth Streets, to see the legal system in action. Monday mornings are a good time to visit. You can also volunteer to participate in moot court at the law school and experience what it is like to be a part of a trial as a witness or juror. Call the law school at 882-66487 and ask if you can participate.

PUTTING TOGETHER A PUZZLE

CONSIDER your learning style. Does it include an analytical and systematic approach to ideas and problems? Do you pay attention to details? Can you make fine distinctions as opposed to relying on general impressions or intuitive insights? Are you intellectually assertive and do you express yourself logically? Can you sift through several possibilities to find the best solution, even if it’s imperfect, or do you have trouble deciding the best course of action when confronted with several possibilities? Law school is not the place for you if you are uncomfortable with the requisite style of learning.

Are you able to see both sides of an issue and argue for the side opposite your personal beliefs? If you cannot separate your personal beliefs or values from the decision-making process, law may not be for you.

The study of law is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle; you need to be able to sort through the little pieces, untangling, sifting and classifying the parts to be able to see the larger picture. Reading for general comprehension is not enough. Even small details matter. In legal writing, the meaning

of each word you use is significant. Therefore, your writing style needs to be precise, concise, and unambiguous.

Will you find it intimidating to carry on a Socratic dialogue with your law professor in front of a hundred or more of your classmates? Your verbal skills and the ability to think on your feet will be tested. If you are threatened by such an environment, you should take public speaking classes and participate in debate before entering law school. Leadership roles in clubs and organizations will give you an opportunity to speak before groups too.

Arrange to sit in on a law school class. Visit with MU's Law School Admissions Office, 103 Hulston Hall, 882-6042 or UMCLawAdmissions@Missouri.edu.

What Should Your Major Be?

ALTHOUGH there are more political science majors in law schools than other majors, there is nothing magical about the connection. Students who are interested in government are also interested in law. Law schools are not looking for a particular major. You should choose a major that genuinely interests you and one where you will make good grades. Law schools make admissions decisions based primarily on your LSAT score and undergraduate GPA. You also may change your mind about attending law school

during your undergraduate education and should choose an undergraduate degree from that standpoint. You should have a Plan B, in case you do not go to law school.

While you are an undergraduate, no matter what your major is, you should take classes that will make you a better writer, a creative thinker and a problem solver. All of these skills are used in any major.

You must be able to read quickly, with good comprehension, and to think logically to achieve a high LSAT score. Choose Philosophy 1200, Introduction to Logic, or Philosophy 2700, Mathematical Logic, as either course is considered excellent preparation for the LSAT. Any upper-level philosophy course that stresses the evaluation and construction of arguments will help to solidify and extend the argumentative skills that are important for students bound for law school.

The skills lawyers need and use are: analyzing, advocating, counseling, communication (writing, speaking, listening), researching and negotiating. Your undergraduate program should include classes that help you develop these skills.

Roberts Scholars

Students who enter MU with an ACT composite score of 30 or higher (or an SAT of 1320) and graduate with a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or above are guaranteed admission to the MU School of Law.

Roberts Scholars must take the LSAT, apply to law school before January 1 of the year they will begin their legal training, and submit the necessary deposit. While the LSAT score does not influence admission, it is a factor in additional scholarship awards.

You must enroll in this program before earning 90 hours of college credit and before taking the LSAT. Contact the MU Law School Admissions Office, 103 Hulston Hall, 882-6042.

- Psychology classes (to help understand human behavior and develop critical thinking skills)
- Religious Studies classes (religion and law often intersect)
- Any class that emphasizes writing.

If you are honors program eligible, you should certainly take advantage of the program by earning a certificate and completing an honors project in your major. Honors classes will help you become accustomed to the high level of competition that is prevalent in law schools. Honors classes also will help you prepare for the LSAT, because they encourage critical and analytical thinking.

Law school Admissions Committees look for students who have shown that they have challenged their thinking and reasoning skills in a diverse course of undergraduate study.

A commitment to school work and maintaining a good GPA needs to begin as a freshman.

Law schools Admissions Committees are not impressed by multiple degrees, easy classes taken only to inflate the GPA, and extra semesters tacked on with the hope of raising the GPA. It is not a good idea to continue to take classes beyond those required for graduation if your only goal is to raise your GPA. It is extremely difficult to raise a GPA after you have 90+ hours of credit and is not worth your time or the expense.

OTHER SUGGESTED CLASSES:

- Basic accounting (helpful in tax and business courses and train you to pay attention to detail)
- Introduction to Economics
- Communication classes
- English literature courses (useful to improve writing skills)
- History and Political Science classes (to improve your research skills)
- Philosophy (especially logic courses)

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

LISTING too many activities isn't impressive; it's unbelievable! Being a fully participatory member in a few organizations is better than being in a number of groups where you do nothing. Gaining leadership skills and problem solving abilities by taking an active role in a few groups will help you be more prepared for law school.

Public speaking, acting courses, and activities involving debate can be useful to develop your confidence in performing before an audience.

MU has a pre-law fraternity - Phi Alpha Delta. Contact the Government and Activities office in A022 Brady Commons, 882-3780, for further information.

Internships with the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, the Public Defender, state legislators and local law firms can be valuable. You will learn time management and responsibility while observing lawyers at work. Remember, anyone can sit in on open court to observe a trial. The City of Columbia courthouse is located at the corner of Sixth Street and Broadway, and the Boone County Circuit Court is at the corner of Cherry and Eighth Streets.

CULTIVATING political awareness by participating in campus, local, regional or national politics is helpful for prospective law students.

Volunteer to work at the polls or campaign for your favorite candidates. Assist at campaign phone banks, hand out leaflets, and get involved with local, state, or regional issues. These experiences build your confidence and skills.

Full Disclosure

Never lie on a law school application form. It is better to **over-disclose** than to omit or minimize past indiscretions.

Disclose all disciplinary actions and all legal offenses, **including juvenile offenses**.

STANDARDIZED ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

THE **LSAT** (Law School Admission Test) is a half-day standardized test, which is required for admission to LSAC-member schools. It provides a standard measure of acquired reading and verbal reasoning skills that law schools often use as a factor to assess applicants. The score scale is 120-180. Schools such as Harvard, Yale, University of Chicago, New York University School of Law, Stanford, University of California-Berkeley, Duke University of Law and the University of Virginia School of Law require a score of 165 or better. MU's usual range for accepted students varies from 154-160.

The test is traditionally given on a Saturday four times a year: February, June, October and December. The cost of the LSAT test is \$132 with an additional \$66 if you register late.

The LSAT is formulated to measure skills considered essential for law school success:

- reading and comprehension of complex texts with accuracy and insight;
- the organization and management of information and the ability to draw reasonable inferences from it;
- the ability to reason critically; and the analysis and evaluation of the reasoning and argument of others

The test comprises five, 35-minute sections, including four sections of multiple-choice questions that include reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, and logical reasoning. The final section is a 30-minute writing sample. The analytical reasoning questions measure your ability to understand the structure of relationships and to draw conclusions about that structure. The reading comprehension questions measure your ability to read with understanding and insight. Logical reasoning questions evaluate your aptitude for understanding, analyzing, criticizing and completing a variety of questions. Each version of the LSAT includes a variable section used to pretest three types of new test items. This part of the test is experimental and not counted for scoring purposes. The 30-minute writing sample at the end of the test is also unscored; however, copies are

sent to each of the law schools to which you apply. Each section is timed, and many students find it difficult to deal with the complex material quickly.

Subscription to LSDAS (Law School Data Assembly Service) is required by most American Bar Association approved law schools. This five-year subscription (\$121) prepares and provides a report for each law school to which you apply. It includes an undergraduate academic summary, copies of all transcripts, LSAT scores, writing samples and letters of recommendation processed by LSAC.

You can pick up an LSAT Information brochure from the Student Success Center; the Political Science Department, 101 Professional Building; the Arts and Science Advising Center, 107 Lowry; or at the Law School, 103 Hulston. *Read the booklet.* Information is also available online at www.LSAC.org. Nearly all services are accessed online with very few paper copies used.

WHEN SHOULD YOU TAKE THE LSAT?

FOR many students an ideal time to take the LSAT is in June before their senior year of undergraduate studies. You will have a month or so after classes end in May to devote exclusively to preparation. A score from the June LSAT will be available in plenty of time for early applications and you will know where you can realistically apply. Registering for the June exam will allow you more flexibility

in case you are sick on the day of the test, or have some other reason to cancel.

The most popular time to take the test is October. If you want to take the test then, plan ahead to take a course reduction to have time to prepare. The October LSAT frequently falls right at mid-terms (another reason to take it in June), further adding to the stress. Delaying the LSAT until December means your score won't be available before it is too late to be useful for early decisions for fall admission as will the February test. The February test is undisclosed so you will never have an opportunity to see what you did right or wrong.

You should plan to have your score available well in advance of stated deadlines. Schools are 65-70% full by the deadlines and aid runs out too.

THE LSAT IS GIVEN
JUNE
OCTOBER
DECEMBER
FEBRUARY

Your test score is valid for five years, and you are only allowed to take the LSAT three times in a two-year period. Some schools prefer a score no older than three years.

SHOULD YOU INVEST IN A PREP COURSE?

PREPARATION for the LSAT is essential; the score is heavily weighted in decisions about admissibility to law schools. Be well prepared in advance of the test. Either Philosophy 1200, Logic, or Philosophy 2700, Mathematical Logic, is a good course to take in preparation. The sooner you get in the habit of thinking logically quickly the better you will score on the LSAT. Talk to others who have taken the test to get a feel for how it will be for you. Taking timed practice tests should help you see what kinds of questions are asked and find out which of your skills need improvement.

The Learning Center, in the Student Success Center (882-2493), allows free access to practice old LSAT's. Study guides and books are available at the bookstore or the library. You can prepare quite adequately on your own, but it does take discipline and time. If you start early to prepare on your own, practice test scores will help you decide if you might profit from a commercial preparatory course.

Courses such as Kaplan or Princeton do force you to practice in an organized manner and after investing in the course, students feel compelled to attend all sessions and should learn helpful hints in coping with the intricacies of the test. However the courses are expensive and

there is disagreement about just how beneficial they are.

The best preparation for the LSAT is to take challenging undergraduate courses that emphasize writing, critical thinking, and analytical skills. The goal is to be successful after you get to law school—not just focused on gaining admission.

The LSAT is deliberately stressful. You are being measured on how well you stand up to the test.

SHOULD YOU RETAKE THE LSAT?

Some students are so dissatisfied with their LSAT score they retake the test. However if you retake the LSAT realize most do not improve dramatically and some score lower. An analysis of 100 MU students who retook the test in recent years showed:

- 69% improved
 - 8% by 9-15 points
 - 20% by 6-8 points
 - 41% by 1-5 points
- 9% received the same score
- 22% scored lower by 1-5 points

You should consider whether retaking the test is going to make a substantial difference in whether you will be accepted and if it will influence potential financial

aid and/or scholarships. Because most people score higher on the second attempt, law schools often discount improvement. Some will forgive an earlier low score with substantial improvement although you may need to explain how you achieved the higher score.

Don't be too hasty in canceling the LSAT. No one feels all that good or confident after finishing the test. Talk over your feelings about the test and your performance with someone before you cancel.

WHERE SHOULD YOU APPLY?

DON'T waste money and time applying to schools where you have little chance of being accepted or where you are only curious about whether you would be accepted.

To see the ranges of LSAT scores and GPAs accepted by U.S. law schools check: www.LSAC.org, under the *Official Guide to ABA Approved Law Schools*. (Keep in mind that published statistics are usually a year old.)

Once you are accepted, be considerate of students still waiting for a place; let the other schools where you have been accepted know you have made your choice.

Other points to consider are cost, geographical location, curriculum, the faculty, the student body and the law school career development office.

Consider where you want to practice. If you plan to stay in Missouri you should consider Missouri schools:

University of Missouri-Columbia
University of Missouri-Kansas City
Saint Louis University
Washington University

Due to the cost of applying and the time required to fill out an application, most students apply to 3-5 schools. If possible, you should visit the schools under consideration. Although law schools are ranked by several publications, you will want to make your decision based on factors important to you. Ratings are subjective.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Questions you may want to ask about prospective law schools:

1. What is the faculty/student ratio?
2. What has the faculty published?
3. Is clinical experience provided?
4. Is the library well-stocked, staffed and equipped?
5. Are there active student organizations?
6. What percentage of students pass the bar exam on the first attempt?
7. How many students are employed as lawyers at graduation?
In nine months?
8. How many are employed in other positions of their choice?
9. How many law firms come to interview on campus? Who decides who gets to interview?
10. Is there a career development office to assist students in a job hunt?
11. What is the cost of the three-year program?
12. What financial aid is available?
13. What is the average debt load at the end of school?
14. Does the school have dual-degree or certificate programs?

INFORMATION ABOUT UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA SCHOOL OF LAW

Admissions Statistics for 2009-2010

<p>Median LSAT 158</p> <p>LSAT 25%-75% 156-160</p> <p>Median GPA 3.51</p> <p>Number of applicants 977</p> <p>Number Accepted 314 (32%)</p> <p>Number Enrolled 153</p> <p>Women 37%</p> <p>Minorities 14%</p> <p>Missouri Residents 86%</p> <p>Applications received by January 1 get priority consideration. Most decisions made between November and April.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2009-2010 TUITION AND FEES</p> <p>Missouri resident \$14,883</p> <p>Non-resident \$14,520 (add \$487 per credit hour)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Estimated Cost of Education</p> <p>Fees- \$1,134</p> <p>Out-of-state \$26,832</p> <p>Books & Supplies \$ 1,550</p> <p>Room & Board \$ 8,590</p> <p>Person/Transportation \$ 5,750</p> <p>Total Missouri resident \$31,970</p> <p>Non-resident \$46,427</p>	
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SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID

IN general, the three main sources of financial aid are grants, scholarships, loans and the Federal Work Study Program. Individual schools may have their own grants, fellowship and scholarship programs.

At MU, merit and need-based scholarships are available. Most law students finance law school through loans. Check the library and online sources for other funding options.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

TWO or three letters of recommendation, preferably from professors, are suggested. Establish relationships early with your professors. You cannot expect a good letter of recommendation from someone who doesn't know you. Don't have family friends, the attorney down the street, or a supervisor from your part-time job write letters for you.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

THERE is no perfect formula for a personal statement, although you should follow some general guidelines. Your statement should be longer than two pages of double-spaced type. The statement should have a professional tone but be interesting and enjoyable to read. Use a neutral-colored paper.

Although some admissions representatives say they read the personal statement first and look at the LSAT and GPA afterward, if you don't fit into the ranges appropriate for a given school, you won't receive serious consideration. The personal statement is a substitute for a personal interview. It should be new material not covered by other pieces of information in your file. For example, it shouldn't be a rehash of your resume. You should tell what is unique about you. Law schools want a wide diversity of backgrounds and experiences in the students admitted.

The main thing you can and should do in a personal statement is show off your ability to write well. Remember the most important tool a lawyer uses is language. Don't be too creative and avoid being cute. On the other hand, don't be boring and avoid endless sentences that begin with I. Stick strictly to the truth; don't embellish, blame, complain, or whine. Stories about your experiences that have shaped and made you learn and grow can be excellent ways to tell about yourself and showcase your writing skills.

If you have grades that need to be explained, do so in a separate, brief

statement, without apology. You may want to tell what your GPA is without that semester when your life fell apart or what your GPA is in your major. If you have had to work against economic, social, or personal disadvantages, you need to include these things in your personal statement.

You should not wait until the last minute to prepare your statement. After writing it, wait a few days and go back to review what you have said. Ask someone who knows you and someone who doesn't know you to read your statement and make suggestions.

A personal statement can be helpful if you fall into a gray area or if the Committee is deciding among several similar candidates.

SOURCES

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